

The Royal Welsh Show: the nation's true cauldron

CROWTHER, Phillip <<http://orcid.org/0000-0002-0124-4547>>, WESTWOOD, Caroline and LANGRIDGE-THOMAS, Greg

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Published version

CROWTHER, Phillip, WESTWOOD, Caroline and LANGRIDGE-THOMAS, Greg (2021). The Royal Welsh Show: the nation's true cauldron. Event Management: an international journal.

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<https://doi.org/10.3727/152599520X15894679115466>

MS 20 027 accepted for publication in *Event Management*

THE ROYAL WELSH SHOW: THE NATION'S TRUE CAULDRON

Dr Greg Langridge-Thomas, Duty Emergency Planning Officer, Project Officer (Events/Civil Contingencies), Powys County Council, Powys County Hall, Spa Road East, Llandrindod Wells Powys, LD1 5LG, Wales. Email: greg.thomas2@powys.gov.uk

Dr Philip Crowther, Reader in Experiencescape, College of Business, Technology and Engineering, Sheffield Business School, Sheffield Hallam University, City Campus, Sheffield, S1 1WB, United Kingdom. Email: Philip.Crowther@shu.ac.uk

Corresponding Author: Caroline Westwood, Senior Lecturer, College of Business, Technology and Engineering, Sheffield Business School, Sheffield Hallam University, City Campus, Sheffield, S1 1WB, United Kingdom. Email: c.westwood@shu.ac.uk

ABSTRACT

The Royal Welsh Show (RWS), which is the largest event of its kind in Europe, is used as a single case study to examine events as a catalyst in the context of networks and the knowledge economy. The long-established essence of agricultural shows is a coalescing of dispersed populations in a temporary cluster, expressed most recently as ‘rural buzz’. This paper takes a new, and emerging, perspective of value and specifically examines how the show, through its manifold platforms and fusing of resources, generates network value. The RWS operates in a 176-acre showground, with exhibitors, partners, and close to 250,000 attendees, therefore engagement platforms are many and varied, and often co-produced. Thus, the event is a canopy, both within and beyond of its 4 days each July, for incalculable planned and less planned interactions and linkages. The event has been labelled ‘the nations true cauldron’, reflecting its proven potential to engage people, and organisations alike, and consequently co-create network value. The extensive case study includes 43 interviews and 1,322 questionnaires, in addition to archival research. The analysis of the quantitative and qualitative data is used to develop a ‘Taxonomy of Platforms’, exposing the multi-layered, co-creative, and pervasive approach to the generation of network value. The findings reveal the importance of such knowledge sharing and creation. Also evident is the manifest and focal role of the RWS in merging the events value creation partners and enabling linkages which can endure and underlie the stimulation and perpetuation of networks. The study endorses the virtue of the network lens through which to examine and reveal event induced value, but also as a way of more introspectively interpreting how value is extracted by event actors.

Keywords: Network value; Agricultural shows; Co-creation; Platforms; Event design

THE ROYAL WELSH SHOW: THE NATION'S TRUE CAULDRON

INTRODUCTION

The Royal Welsh Show (RWS), which is the largest event of its kind in Europe with approaching 250,000 visitors each year (North Wales Daily Post, 2015a), provides a rich lens through which to examine events as a catalyst in the creation of value. Agricultural shows remain relatively understudied in the literature (Woods, 2010), yet extant research does capture their considerable economic, social, and cultural significance (Edwards, 2008; Gorman-Murray, Quinn, 2009; Waitt & Gibson, 2012). The long-established essence of agricultural shows is a physical coalescing of dispersed populations in a form of a temporary cluster, whereby knowledge and best practice is shared (Bathelt, Malmberg, & Maskell, 2004). This is akin to Thomas' (2016) recent characterisation of the RWS as 'rural buzz', expressed as a distinct rural knowledge ecology, facilitated by face-to-face contact, temporary co-presence and co-location of rural actors. Consequently, this paper takes a less conventional perspective of value and examines how the RWS acts as a significant and omnipresent force in the stimulation, and perpetuation, of networks.

Recognising the fundamental role of the RWS as a stimulus for interactions, and thus a generator of knowledge and network value, is integral to Thomas' characterisation of rural buzz. Network value as discussed by Richards and Colombo (2017) is recognised as a softer and less mainstream form of event induced value. Other writers, in seeking to disentangle the value of events, have adopted a similar view in recognising live events as, high worth, engagement platforms which facilitate interactions (Ramaswamy, 2011). Crowther and Donlan (2011, p. 1445) emphasise that the singular expression of an event as an engagement platform is disingenuous and actually events, and particularly those with the scale of the RWS, encompass a

multiplicity of engagement platforms which are “...internal or external, and up or down the value chain, with the intention of creating mutually valuable experiences and enhancing networks”. Therefore, the network effects of events are a fertile area for empirical research (Richards & Colombo, 2017).

The RWS was established in 1904, and the 100th edition of the event was staged in 2019. Given its rich heritage and considerable scale, it represents an enthralling case study of how an event’s diversity of platforms, and entwining of resources, underpin their inducement of network value (Richards, 2013). The show can figuratively be viewed as a canopy, encasing a diversity of platforms and resources, through which networks are co-created, or more ominously co-destructed - dependent upon their effectiveness (Plé & Cáceres, 2010). Aligned with the notion of a contemporary network society, Welsh author Mike Parker (2011) characterises the RWS as the “nation’s true cauldron”, exemplifying Castell’s (2010) argument relating to the crucial importance of cities, countries, and / or industries proactively perpetuating networks (or cauldrons), Parker’s intention being to articulate the integral role of the RWS in the furtherment of Welsh agriculture. Consequently, this paper’s overarching aim is to deconstruct and analyse the RWS, examining how platforms, and the integration of resources, generates network value.

An insightful examination of ‘how’ the RWS enables network value impinges upon a mapping of the manifold platforms underlying the show and this is enabled through an extensive and multifaceted case study of the RWS incorporating 43 interviews, 1,322 questionnaires, in addition to archival research. This paper makes an incremental contribution to knowledge through a detailed case study of a significant and complex event, which, as Richards and Colombo (2017) discovered in their examination of the Sonar Festival, extends beyond the ‘Hub Event’ itself. Our analysis depicts a multifaceted arrangement of elements and platforms, which

simultaneously endorses and refutes O'Toole's (2011) characterisation of an events design as 'planned' (p.183) – depicting a more hybrid picture triggering planned and more serendipitous exchanges. Value creation partners (Vargo & Lusch, 2004) co-create an elongated eventscape and therein augment value (Grönroos & Ravald, 2011). The case study reveals a derived framework, entitled 'Taxonomy of Platforms', exposing a multi-layered, co-creative, and pervasive approach.

Further to the overarching aim of these studies expressed above, the following three specific research questions were established. Firstly, what value do the actors involved in the RWS seek to extract?; secondly, how do the multifarious platforms enable network value?, and thirdly, how can the configuration of these platforms be conceptualised? In achieving this, the paper continues with three literature-based sections, firstly a contextualisation of agricultural shows, an examination of events as value creation spaces, and then the facilitation of rural buzz. Following this is the methods section, then a presentation of the findings. Finally, there is a discussion and emergent framework, before the paper concludes.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Agricultural Shows: Background

As rural festivals and events in the UK have flourished, with 7 million visits to agricultural shows annually (Association of Show and Agricultural Organisations, 2016), interest in understanding their significance has risen in the geographical, tourism, and events management literatures (Edwards, 2008; Marsden, 2010; Smith & Bender, 2001). Typically, the small body of literature has focussed upon cultural and social change (Gibson & Connell, 2011; Gorman-Murray et al., 2012), the reproduction of place and of tradition (Edwards, 2008), and

also the role of communities as producers and consumers (Quinn, 2009). Certainly, there is limited, or negligible, focus upon agricultural shows through the lens of network value.

Agricultural shows act as a nexus for tourism and agriculture (Mitchell, 2006) which are the two single most important industries for rural areas. Agricultural shows thus represent an established form of tourism, based within the agricultural realm, and whereby visitors are empowered to experience a wide array of agricultural products within a themed setting (Mitchell, 2006). They are, typically, long established and hallmark events (Hall, 2005), yet their role and significance - importantly for this study - transcend their tourism function (Edwards, 1999). They are recognised as hugely influential on the development of rural areas, their role is high worth, and they have contributed significantly to improving, for example, husbandry technique, stock quality, and also enabling the country to meet the needs for increased food production (Henning, 1998).

Eversole and Martin (2005) recognise agricultural shows as highly important cultural events, for communities and for the defining rural national identity. They have been characterised as the localisation of modernity (Smith & Bender, 2001) with producers and consumers meeting in their local place, and in contrast to modern, complex and depersonalised global market chains. Aside from their very obvious impact on the agriculture industry, they are also recognised as a powerful means of communication between farmers and the general public; allowing their story to be told and counteracting unfair perceptions of the industry that disguise and distract from important issues and advances in Welsh agriculture (Henning, 1998).

Although agricultural shows are public events where all are welcome, a distinct insider/outsider dichotomy exists (Marsden, 2010). The insiders to the event are those that have, to some reasonable extent, agricultural knowledge and might bring livestock and/or the products

of their harvest to be displayed and judged. Prosterman (1995) notes that these are the ‘insiders’ and they will always make time to visit and speak to their fellow insiders, and those businesses that service and support them throughout the year. Whereas, and by contrast, outsiders attend agricultural shows to be – more typically - entertained, whilst of course also to be educated to the ways of the countryside. Kokko (2011) critiques this dichotomy as overly simplistic and divisive, arguing that agricultural shows have the presence of three distinct groups; producer, local guest; and non-local guests/tourists. Alternately Kokko (ibid) emphasises the important and more inclusive role of producers in the production and organisation of the event, and to educate the non-farming audience about the importance of agriculture.

Agricultural Shows as Value Creation Spaces

An advantageous context for this study is the recent work of varied writers, but particularly Vargo and Lusch, who theorise about the shift from a Goods Dominant Logic (G-D logic) to Service Dominant Logic (S-D logic). An important tenet of this thinking is that value is not embedded in products and is moreover extracted and co-created with consumer and other value creation partners (Vargo & Lusch, 2004). This is a useful lens for event scholars, and creators alike, to adopt and advocates a shift toward a more facilitative mindset. Large agricultural shows comprise an amalgamation of platforms, from which actors can extract value, and are to some extent co-produced / created (to varying degrees) by value creation partners, principally, custodian, sponsors, exhibitors, suppliers, and importantly attendees. A key concept in S-D logic is the primacy of operant resources (Normann, 2001; Vargo & Lusch, 2008), wherein all actors possess knowledge, skills, capabilities and experiences, which when fused into a co-creative process, augment value.

This also relates to the concept of network value, as defined by Richards and Colombo (2017), which rests upon the premise that networks enable value creation beyond what individual members can realise alone. The role of events, and in this case the RWS, is therefore defined as, “providing experiential interactions and encounters which customers perceive as helping them utilise their resources” (Payne, Storbacka & Frow, 2008, p. 87). This resource integration function, discussed by Vargo and Lusch (2006), is a productive lens through which to consider how the RWS is, palpably, a container of manifold engagement platforms to fuse resources, and thus catalyse value. Agricultural events are a temporal and spatial canvas which although possessing a unifying theme, are much more fragmented than that would suggest as they contain many idiosyncratic elements – reflective of the many and varied interests of network actors. Stakeholders are therefore value creation partners infused with distinctive and beneficial resources – and the activation of these within the event is what Orefice (2018) considers the third stage on the event design ladder.

An early attempt to articulate S-D logic and related ideas in the context of events, was Crowther and Donlan’s notion of events as value-creation spaces. This was defined by varied criteria and including “...congregation and/or coalescence of internal and/or external network actors; and a programme, distinct from day-to-day operations and processes, that would include core elements that may embrace learning, social, and entertainment” (2011, p. 1448). This portrayal resonates with the essence of the RWS, located in its permanent 176-acre year showground in Llanelwedd, Wales, attracting many diverse value creation partners, and containing a rich mix of learning, social, and entertainment led platforms.

Although the RWS, as a value creation space, has changed significantly since its origins in 1904, it has retained its strongly embedded identity as a ritualistic site for the Welsh farming

community. However, the show's strongly embedded reputation as an entirely farming occasion, has been steadily diminished as attendance has increased. Simultaneously, in this time, there has been a fragmentation – with more 'non-agricultural country dwellers' and also 'townies' in attendance. Therefore, the Royal Welsh Agricultural Society (referred to as RWAS from this point) and custodians of the RWS have evolved their approach and more fully embrace the synergetic role of other value creation partners (Ramaswamy, 2009; Sheth & Usley, 2007). Such evolution can be challenging for events, which are often engrained in more archetypal management centric control attitude (Bowdin, Allen, O'Toole, Harris & McDonell, 2006; Shone & Parry, 2004).

As examined more fully in the later sections, the RWS coalesces a variety of stakeholders, including individuals, public and private organisations and policymakers. Simultaneously it is a forum for leisure, learning, community building, debate, influencing, and also policy making; the RWS website reflects this evolution stating that, "the role of the modern RWS is a rounded one...". Certainly, the show comprises wide ranging value creation platforms (Grönroos, 2008; Crowther & Orefice, 2015) demonstrated through the many and varied examples in the findings and discussion sections of this paper. Importantly the success of such platforms is underpinned by the facilitation of value, which Grönroos and Raval (2011, p. 8) express as when 'the customer becomes better off in some respect, as subjectively judged by the customer'. However, and often, such value is not perceived, or entirely perceived until much later (Orefice, 2018).

Agricultural Shows: Facilitating Rural Buzz

Rural buzz is an encompassing term applied by Thomas (2016) to capture the multiple outcomes from the RWS. It is an augmentation of Bathelt et al (2004) notion of global buzz,

which emphasised the capacity of knowledge clusters to expedite connections and is consistent with Sacco's (2017) work in likening events to creative clusters enabling the combining of actors. It articulates a prevailing recognition that the RWS is a vital juncture, acting as a nexus for many and varied linkages underpinning economic, social, cultural, and environmental outcomes. Events such as the RWS, are profoundly distinct from patterns of ordinary life and represent disruptions to time and space (Patterson & Getz, 2013; Turner, 1969) whose very existence promises opportunity. Particularly in the case of the farming community, agricultural shows are a prized opportunity for knowledge exchange, problem solving, and better understanding of markets and competitors (Maskell, Bathelt & Malmberg, 2006; Schuldt & Bathelt, 2011). For other attendee groupings, perhaps the 'outsiders' (as characterised earlier) the promise of more prosaic outcomes such as enjoyment, relaxation and escapism is the allure.

In realising desired outcomes, or what is known as return on attendance (ROA), attendees establish their own paths of desire as their journey through their relationship with the event. Indeed, the very essence of an event's design is the experiences lived differently by different audiences (Orefice, 2018). In realising rural buzz, the RWS therefore acts as a mechanism to fuse social relations and in so doing influence present and future activities (Foley et al., 2014), providing prized opportunities for processes of knowledge exchange and acquisition (Maskell et al., 2006). A useful conceptualisation is therefore of such events as temporary sophisticated knowledge ecosystems, where possibilities are facilitated, or obstructed (Bathelt & Cohendet, 2014; Schuldt & Bathelt, 2011). Possibilities may be discovered intentionally or serendipitously (Dew, 2009; Fiet, 2007) and previous studies have discussed how such opportunities emerge through people, existing networks, and interaction with the designed, and less designed, environment (Hechavarria & Welter, 2015). Gardien, Deckers & Christiaansen (2014) work is

unequivocal, in this respect, stating that value is co-created through peer to peer interaction in networks, and events afford a distinctively social space which innately encourages such socialisation (Foley & Schlenker, 2014).

Sligo and Massey's (2007) work also highlights the importance of social connections, facilitated through rural recreational events, and their role in coalescing groups that are otherwise isolated. Social capital is expressed as "the connections among individuals' social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them" (Putnam, 2000, p.19), and agricultural shows therefore have the potential to generate both bonding and bridging forms of social capital. They strengthen existing ties/relationships and underpin enhanced community cohesion (bonding), and also build bridges between groups that might not necessarily have a common bond and can thus mobilise them for common causes (bridging). These values of social networks within agricultural events are echoed in other studies which examine social networks, and their resultant value, in other events contexts, such as festivals (Baerenholdt, 2012; Jarman, Theodoraki, Hall & Ali-Knight, 2014). Where social capital can be built and maintained at events, a high level of trust is enabled, something which Harvey (2003) summarises as an indicator of people's willingness to place faith in, and commit to, relationships which facilitate knowledge exchange.

Writers have referred to the stimulus of the fleeting, and artificial reality presented by events, and the potential this has to erode commonplace social and personal constraints (Simmel, 1964). This can enable a freer environment where people can engage, with others and the environment, in more speculative thought and creativity. Wolf and Troxler (2008), reflecting upon this transient reality, consider the shared meanings that can emerge and emphasise the appealing notion of 'we-feeling', akin to a more shared social reality – juxtaposing this with

more archetypal power structures. Events should thus cultivate such interaction (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004) and inspire participation and engagement (McCole, 2004). Interactions are facilitated through what is traditionally termed touchpoints (Booms & Bitner, 1981), but, and also, and more abstractly, platforms (Richards & Colombo, 2017), or engagement platforms (Ramaswamy, 2009). A further, and useful, augmentation of platforms is moderators, as discussed by Hansen, Monllor and Shrader (2016), who characterised environmental factors as moderators, and explained how these can underpin entrepreneurial opportunities. These are categorised as resources, technologies, and also ideas that people are exposed to. The notion places emphasis on the actor, or attendee, and is less tangible, and certainly more ephemeral, than other characterisations such as touchpoints and platforms. Agricultural events could thus be perceived as assimilators of many and varied moderators (Crowther, Orefice & Beard, 2018), with such assimilation influential in perpetuating and proliferating existing opportunities and forming new ones (Hechavarria & Welter, 2015).

METHODOLOGY

Research Strategy

This paper emerged as part of an exploratory study over three seasons of the RWS, and coherent with a realist paradigm (Perry, 1998) a case study approach was adopted. More specifically a single-case design (Yin, 2009), encasing a multi-methods approach was applied, something which Woods (2010) has remarked is largely absent from rural studies. The meticulous examination of multiple sources, surrounding the same event, enables a confirmation and deepening of understanding (Woodside & Wilson, 2003). In advancing this we willingly concede the limitations of generalisability (Eisenhardt, 1989), but given the scant research in this

area, an exploratory study rich in qualitative data is useful in advancing knowledge and leading forward to future studies.

Data Sources

A mixed methods approach was adopted in order to reduce the limitations of individual methods (Cook, 2005) and to be able to strengthen the overall findings of the study (Baxter & Eyles, 1997). Forty-three interviews provided richness (Clifford, French & Valentine, 2010) and in-depth knowledge of the individual respondents' experiences, attitudes, motives, and beliefs (Mikecz, 2012; Valentine, 2005). Whilst the quantitative information, comprising 1027 survey responses from visitors and 295 from the trade, provides context and background - complementing the more subjective qualitative data.

A narrative approach (Willis, 2006), was applied to analyse the transcripts from partner stakeholders, farmers, government representatives, RWAS representatives and media representatives. Additionally, the Royal Welsh Agricultural Society publishes a journal and an annual report, which provides detail on each Royal Welsh Show, and these were analysed by taking a discourse analysis approach, similar to that used by Morris and Evans (2001). The analysis focussed upon common themes and changes, and the influence that the Show has had on rural society.

Data Analysis

We followed the approaches of Abdallah and Langley (2014) and Heracleous (2006), viewing all data as text to build an understanding of the key themes – as shown in the organisation of the findings. The researchers independently looked for central themes within this body of data, a form of confirmability testing. Finally, the researchers' interpretations of these data were aggregated around the research aim and questions, and specifically the data were

analysed using a two-level coding process, as outlined by Cope (2010). The survey data had previously been analysed using NVivo.

FINDINGS

Data analysis was guided by the overarching research aim, and the research questions identified in the last paragraph of the introduction. The central themes, emerging from this are reflected in the headings and organisation of this findings section.

Miscellaneous Stakeholders

Table 1 presents the survey results and reflects the multifaceted makeup of the RWS. It demonstrates the varied types and intentions of visitors and the exhibitors (inclusive of all event sponsors and partners), and also how they differentially engage in different aspects of the RWS. It shows that the majority of attendees (68%) express a leisure oriented motivation as their reason for attending (including day out, family holiday, and family), and with 30% reporting a business-related intention (inclusive of competing, education, trader). Notably 61% of the total attendees indicated they are from a farming background, leaving 39% as 'outsiders', as discussed earlier.

<<< Table 1 about here>>>

Diverse Platforms

The evidence of the primary research is that the platforms provided by the event vary significantly in their characteristics and dynamics, from highly informal and fleeting moments to extensively choreographed platforms, with much longer anticipated dwell times. This array of platforms, and the value of the more impromptu exchanges they encourage, is reflected in comments such as, "it's learning by osmosis at the Royal Welsh, you don't even know that you are learning something, its often just chat but you see and learn something new" (farmer). The

poignantly named 'education pavilion', and similar platforms populated by partners such as National Farmers Union (NFU) and Country Land and Business Association (CLA), are more structured spaces that through their more marketplace-like design are intended to promote conversation. A recurring message from the data was the perceived high worth of informal, chance, interactions, "you'll see new products in the Farmers Weekly, but you don't really know whether it will do what you want, but when you talk to people at the show and explain how it works, you understand the value of it"(farmer).

The promoting of rural change, and innovation, was evident at the diverse platforms in the show, for example the (much more choreographed) Tomorrow Today exhibition and seminars, coproduced by Farming Connect and the RWAS, showcasing innovations in agriculture. Platforms such as this are notably facilitative in their design, cultivating informality and thus discussion, evidenced by the findings; "the exhibition has provided an insight into what will be the norm on Welsh farms in say five or ten years' time or more... valuable opportunities this provides in a learning format" (exhibitor) or "Innovis does a cheese and wine evening, and that is an informal talk where everyone hears what problems they've got, what good things are happening.... It's handy for farmers to talk to others (partner stakeholder) where else would we get this opportunity, we just don't" (farmer). Demonstrating this stimulation of linkages and networks, Bella Ag (Cattle health company) won an innovation in agriculture award, for which the prize was an exclusive supply contract with one of the RWS sponsors, Wynnstay Limited (agricultural supplier).

Interconnecting Actors

One of the ways the show enables business success is by providing a platform for researching and garnering interest in new products, for example the agri-food businesses. RWS

is an enabler of business exchanges in rural areas that are generally sparsely populated with retail outlets; “you walk around (the show) and look at new things....they bring new products onto the market and that’s the place to go and see it” (exhibitor). For example, the NatWest Entrepreneur Accelerator programme subsidises ‘pop up’ pitches; prioritising brands whose products are produced or manufactured in Wales and that are innovative or unique. Kevin Morgan, from NatWest Cymru, emphasised their desire to “... help start-up brands showcasing their products to the hundreds of thousands of people that will visit this event (RWAS, 2019a) – further illustrating the Show’s role in connecting actors.

The launch in February 2019 of a separate hub event, the ‘Innovation Day’ event, showcased and created conversation around the latest equipment, “... perfect opportunity to witness new and affordable technology first hand... securing the future of Welsh agriculture in these uncertain times,” (North Wales Live, 2015b). Further hub events, within the RWS event portfolio, which reach out to engage with wider countryside actors, include the ‘Smallholdings and Countryside Show’. Held each spring, this event offers an interesting rurality for those seeking new experiences, and provides opportunities for attendees to connect; “....those who have a love of the countryside and outdoor activities at the heart of the event... with a wealth of have-a-go activities and loads of ideas to take away and try at home... ” Kay Spencer (Festival Director) (RWAS, 2019b).

Facilitating Conversation

The RWS acts as a conduit for conversation at all levels, between many actors and groupings, and inside and beyond the time and space parameters of the event. Such opportunities to converse are valued for varied reasons, with respondents appreciating the critical ‘amphitheatre’ of the RWS. The opportunity to learn and influence (often politically), was also a

standout theme; "... announcements about major agri-environmental schemes made at the Royal Welsh, it is deemed to be the appropriate place to do it" (government representative) and "[The Royal Welsh Show] will continue to be the place you have to be that third week of July, you know, I hope the show will continue to be the place that politicians consider it is a really important place to be" (partner stakeholder). High profile visitors, such as the European Commissioner for Agriculture in 2015, are the norm and the fundamental relationship between the RWS and the Welsh government is mutually valued, as one respondent reflected, "... we [the RWAS] were asked to sort of involve ourselves in major issues and I think when these major issues sort of cropped up, that stemmed from the first regular meetings that we were getting with the Minister, it was very much a two-way process, we benefited and the Minister was always prepared to meet us." Indeed the RWS collectively is increasingly seen, despite their apolitical stance, as an important voice within the Welsh agricultural arena and they recognise that "we [the show] will have to make more direct contributions to the steer and direction of agriculture, in partnership with Government departments and Ministerial departments therefore contribute to the voice....".

To satisfy people's aspiration to learn and influence, there are high profile gatherings between politicians and industry leaders, for example the HCC Meat Promotion Wales Breakfast on day 1 of the show; with invited senior executives from surveying, legal, banking and agricultural sectors - and representatives from the RWS itself. This highly choreographed gathering offers distinctive network value; "there is more accessibility to the Minister [Wales Agricultural Minister], more open and more intense, so that adds additional value to it than, from ordinary meetings, often behind closed doors" (partner stakeholder) and "...I mean it's got to help, that interaction.....so you can see that they [politicians] are human and understand the

issues, it's bound to help"(farmer), and "it's the place for the policy makers to really showcase what they are doing"(media representative). Comparable examples include Breed Society Stockman dinners, The Worshipful Company of Woolman, and Farmer's Union of Wales (FUW) panel discussions and seminars (in the FUW pavilion), exploring key issues facing the farming industry in Wales (FUW, 2019).

Simulating Knowledge

Key platforms within the RWS (and notably coproduced with the NFU) deliver various initiatives around food education, such as 'farm to fork' and 'Great British Food Gets My Vote,' and developing closer links in the food chain between producers and consumers. Food producers perceive this as integral to their return on investment for attendance; "We can educate them, probably on the butchery side, on healthy eating, on the benefits of eating red meat, balanced diet. There are a number of things that add together" (exhibitor). More formal education is not a particularly important motivation for attendees, with only 5% of respondents referring to it. But learning can add value to a 'fun' day out, as the RWS is a "conduit that allows people to have an appreciation, a relative understanding, and an experience of something that they are not used to everyday" (exhibitor).

Learning transcends all actors, whether this be seeking an enhanced understanding of policy, new innovations in machinery, food chain, or more generally, of rural life. Learning is pervasive within the RWS, and also beyond – for example, the schools engagement roadshow (#CowsOnTour) which finished off at the 2019 Smallholding and Countryside Festival. An RWAS spokesperson discussed the purpose to "... tell the farming story, raise awareness of the RWAS, encourage farmers to tell their story and raise funds for farming charities..." (RWAS, 2019c).

Farmers' knowledge, particularly relating to livestock and husbandry, is highly regarded and the show acts as an arena for the sharing of such knowledge with the non-farming public to heighten their awareness and to educate them about agriculture and food production. Therefore, and while farmers certainly perceive the show and the competitions (see below) as a business activity, the farmers share a sense of impassioned mood, intensity of feeling and passionate dedication; "quite a few people would say that half of it [the showing of livestock] is having a good animal and the other half is the showmanship about how they present it, you know" (farmer).

Competition Value

Competition is a longstanding principle of the RWS with the livestock exhibits being cited by 13% of respondents as the primary reason for attending. Livestock farmers consider this a crucial component of the show; "it [the RWS] provides excellent competition and can help raise standards of livestock and competing livestock, and it is really valuable for that purpose", (partner stakeholder) and "it has influenced betterment as far as livestock exhibits are concerned and genetics...people wish to see genetic progress in the flesh, to touch it and feel it, and where better to see it than at the Royal Welsh" (media representative).

There is acknowledgement that the significance of showing livestock is diminishing, and the social elements are increasing. For example, the wellbeing of farmers is crucial, "... a huge social element bringing people together, it is bringing that rivalry, and I think that people enjoy that" (RWAS representative). Yet, and as a respondent distinguishes, "it is kind of sliding slightly out of view" (media representative). Therefore, it is important that competition and awards, as a proven platform that the RWS invest in, remain and proliferate in other aspects, for example the Food Hall's design, which is sophisticated in allowing exhibitors to simultaneously

compete with their products alongside the more routine selling. Given the RWS' heritage, prizes awarded have high worth, and winning a category adds considerably to brand value, in an increasingly crowded agri-food marketplace; with awards such as 'Best Welsh Cheese' and 'Supreme Cheese'. The critical role of food within the show and the investment in the food hall exhibition space is evidenced, with interviewee responses such as; "The new Food Hall compared to the old one is an absolute wonder, no comparison is there, the Society looking to the future will have more and more important role in marketing Welsh produce"(partner stakeholder). This venue is well received, generally by respondents, with other also discussing its worth in co-creative discussions between food producers, "the food hall is a really good place where that can happen and promote produce and where it is made" (exhibitor).

DISCUSSION

As the custodian of the RWS, the RWAS has an overarching and facilitative role, which is in part influenced by its education and knowledge transfer agenda and the aim 'to encourage and promote agricultural science, research and education in particular in relation to food, farming and the countryside' (RWAS, 2019d). Therefore, the RWS has provided an opportune case study through which to interpret events in the context of networks and platforms. Explicitly, this article set out to deconstruct and analyse the RWS in order to distinguish the platforms, resources, and the thus network value. Brand and Rocchi (2011) comment on the transition from an experience to a knowledge economy as challenging organisations to establish platforms favourable to knowledge exchange and value co-creation – implicit within the RWAS aim outlined above.

Research question one asked what value the actors involved in the RWS seek to extract. The event actors, as evidenced through the findings and signalled in the literature review, are

manifold in their makeup and motivations, therefore creating an extensive remit for the show's custodians. Beyond the more obvious short term, and pleasure-seeking outcomes, the findings derived from the surveys and the qualitative texts, indicate the primacy of what Thomas (2016) terms the rural knowledge ecology, the sharing, and regeneration, of knowledge and good practice. There is much that can be gleaned from the empirical data which demonstrate the integral role of the RWS in this respect through the facilitated platforms and integration of resources through the event.

Research question two focussed upon how the multifarious platforms of the RWS generate network value, and the findings related to this are multi-layered. There are many and varied co-creative platforms, programmed throughout the show (and beyond), that often are co-produced by multiple value creation partners, and through which event actors can engage, extract value, and fuse linkages to networks. However, what is very evident from the study is that the value perceived by respondents extends well beyond these more structured exchanges; and importantly, these exchanges are typically facilitative and conversational in design. Evidently, from the data analysed, attendees intuitively create their own social realities – thus activating different resources around the event and creating their own meaning from it (Van Winkle & Bueddefeld, 2016). In this respect event participants, as resources, become moderators, as suggested by Hansen et al. (2016). Attendees autonomously, within and beyond the more intentional platforms, engage with the ideas, resources, and so forth that infuse the eventscape – and these derived, or extracted, experiences are often perceived as being valuable. Henceforth a noteworthy emphasis falls upon less designed and more unanticipated interactions shaped by social structures and practices (Richards, 2015). Indeed, a resounding message from the data

was that agricultural shows embody the community and they are, at their very heart, an opportunity to meet people who they might not otherwise encounter (Edwards, 2008).

This case study emphasises the diversity of engagement platforms interspersed throughout, and extending beyond, the show. In addressing research question three and conceptualising these platforms, there are two continuums in evidence. The first ranges from platforms tightly controlled by RWAS to those organically created by other actors. In between these two extremes are devolved and often co-produced platforms developed with and by event partners. The second continuum reflects the spatial and time dimension. Many platforms exist within the temporal and spatial parameters of the 4-day event, whereas, and increasingly, the RWS's activities are increasingly ubiquitous, ranging throughout the year and beyond the showground. Figure 1 expresses this miscellany of engagement platforms. Note that the platforms identified in Figure 1 are indicative and not exclusive.

<<<*Figure 1 about here*>>>

Figure 1 illustrates how RWS comprises an assembly of platforms, enunciated within the data collection as 'a show within a show', and containing RWS programmed, partner-led, and organic platforms. Given the scale of the RWS, populating the event, necessarily, extends beyond platforms programmed by the event owners, and necessitates a strategy which embraces co-production with event partners and also encourages innovation and spontaneity (Bowdin et al., 2006; Shone & Parry, 2004). It is evident through this study that by embracing a more co-productive approach to platforms, and a co-creative mindset, the RWS provides an environment favourable to the cultivation of moderators and thus creation of network value. An implication of this devolved approach is that the makeup of the show is more an assemblage than an

ensemble – and the structured nature of the assemblage inexorably influences how the event reverberates (Dew, 2009).

CONCLUSION

The RWS has been a valuable lens through which to elucidate the integral role of field configuring events (Lampel & Meyer, 2008) in the establishment and evolution of networks. The focal role of the RWS as an integrator of resources (Vargo & Lusch, 2004), habitually merging event actors / value creation partners in many and varied ways has been manifested in this study, and provides a useful expression, and elucidation, of Thomas' notion of rural buzz. This study reveals RWS as a significant enabler of linkages, which stimulate and perpetuate networks offering both structured and unstructured opportunities to combine actors, thus triggering shorter term interaction, and underpinning longer term outcomes. In expressing such events as mechanisms to facilitate rural buzz, the challenge for scholars is to further examine and elucidate how these events can be orchestrated to achieve this.

A key insight from this paper is the rich and varied configuration of engagement platforms which attract attention, coalesce resources, and enable flows of power among diverse network actors (Richards, 2013). The unique platforms provided by the RWS are many and varied, and our conceptualisation of these is depicted in the derived framework shown in Figure 1. Drawing upon Orefice's (2018) recent work, and also that of Richards (2015), it is noteworthy that the value created, as perceived by respondents, is often derived from less structured and nebulous interactions, across varied platforms, as people navigate the social context of the event (Edvardsson, Tronvoll & Grube, 2011). This further accentuates the facilitative rather than prescriptive remit for event creation and the contingent relationship that a wide and eclectic taxonomy of platforms has with the realisation of rural buzz. The creation and

maintenance of knowledge clusters (Bathelt et al., 2004) or creative clusters (Sacco, 2017) extend what event managers might traditionally consider their remit of responsibility and influence. This paper consequently identifies a more expansive and integrated range of platforms which underlie the stimulation of network value, and also a widened role for event creators, whose challenge is to both activate and harness such value.

The co-creative tone, evident throughout the findings, emphasises fluidity, rather than rigidity, which highlights the virtue of a co-creative philosophy for event creation, which can encourage more devolved production and reproduction of networks. Indeed, recent research seeking to advance understanding of event design articulates such events as innovative and co-creative processes, which are preoccupied with the discovery of opportunities for business transformation (Lockwood, 2009; Orefice, 2018). Thus, events are value creation platforms (Crowther & Orefice, 2015), with high potential to inspire network value, and in the case of the RWS to affirm Mike Parker's characterisation (of RWS) as the "nation's true cauldron".

LIMITATIONS, IMPLICATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The adoption of a single case study approach results in an idiosyncratic study and inevitably this limits generalisability. However, and given the embryonic stage of this research into events and network value, such exploratory research is vital to present early theory and conceptualisation to advance pedagogy, and for other studies to test. Furthermore, given the large number of agricultural events and other multi day outdoor events around the world, this study provides theoretical insights which can be examined, applied, developed, and or rebuked by future studies.

A specific implication of this paper is how network value emerges through an interplay of both planned and unplanned platforms within an extended eventscape. Within the context of

growing professionalisation of events management, it is noteworthy to emphasise how stakeholders perceive and derive value from events differentially, and therefore the challenge for event creators is to facilitate a diversity of opportunity. Such opportunities transcend the more traditional confines of the planned event, representing a widened range, and integration, of value creation factors.

The paper reveals a two-sided perspective of network value in the context of events. Firstly, it has emphasised areas of event value creation often ignored by academics and practitioners. Awareness of these opportunities is important for event creators in their efforts to harness and articulate the value created by events, both to justify pre-existing investment, and also encourage future patronage. Secondly, while network value is certainly stimulated by aspects of events that are more purposefully designed – the stimulation of such value extends beyond what event managers might readily recognise as traditional elements of their event management planning. Consequently, practitioners and academics alike need to embrace an outcome-orientated perspective (Crowther, 2014) if they are to achieve fresh insights and new directions.

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EVENT MANAGEMENT

Table 1.**Event Actors**

	Attendees	Exhibitors
Number	237,694	1,010
Number of days at the show	1 day – 38% 2 days – 18% 3 days – 10% 4 days – 35%	N/A
Reasons for attending	46% Day out 17% Family Holiday 15% Business 8% Competing 5% Family competing/supporter 5% Education 2% Trader 2% Other	35% - Retail trading 48% - Raise their profile 7% - To facilitate demonstrations 7% - Education purposes 3% - Charitable and other reasons
Are you from a farming background?	Yes 61% No 39%	Minimum 60% Agricultural focused exhibitors
Attendees In which section of the RWS do you spend the majority of your time?	27% Animals 10% Machinery 14% Food & Drink 8% YFC 13% Shopping	23% Agricultural 29% Retail (non-agricultural) 8% Charity 4% Food and Drink 11% Craft
Exhibitors Types of business/organisations represented at RWS	14% Main Ring 6% Countryside care 6% Forestry 2% Other	3% Education 2% Politics/campaigning 3% Renewable Energy 3% Public bodies/government 2% Professional/financial services 12% Other

Figure 1. Platforms

